

COMMUNICATIONS
TELEGRAPHY

DRAWER

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CIVIL WAR

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The Civil War

Communications and Telegraphy

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

THE ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH. The following interesting letter relative to the completion and laying of the Atlantic Telegraph cable, has been received by one of the directors in New York:

ATLANTIC TELEGRAPH COMPANY,
12 St. Helen's Place,
Bishopgate street, Within, E. C.,
LONDON, March 25, 1865.

Dear sir: In reply to the memorandum dated the 25th of February, and signed by yourself and other American gentlemen, recommending to the London Board the engagement of Captain James Anderson, of the steamer China as the commander of the Great Eastern, I am requested to state that the directors in London entirely coincide with their colleagues in America upon this subject, and it will be interesting to gentlemen on your side, as confirming their judgment, to know that it had already been decided here, before knowing that any view in favor of Captain Anderson was entertained in New York, that he was the most proper person for the office, and the permission of Sir Samuel Cunard had been asked in order to allow of an offer being made to Captain Anderson.

It has now been arranged that Captain Anderson shall take charge of the Great Eastern immediately after his re-arrival in England with the China, on the 2d of May.

You will be pleased to know that by the time you receive this upwards of one thousand eight hundred miles of our cable will have been completed in a perfect state, and of a quality in every respect vastly superior to any cable that has ever yet been manufactured.

We shall take to sea two thousand three hundred miles altogether. The remainder is being made at the rate of eighty miles per week.

About one thousand miles are coiled on board the Great Eastern, and we expect that by the end of May the whole will be completed and on board, so that by the third week in June the machinery and every appliance for the use of the engineer may be in its place and ready for sailing; and in a month from that time I trust that you may learn that our two great nations are permanently united by the electric wire.

With great respect, I am, dear sir, faithfully yours,

CEO. SEWARD,
Secretary and General Superintendent.
A. A. Low, Esq., 31 Burling slip, New York.

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S VISIT TO RICHMOND. A correspondent of the New York Herald gives the following account of President Lincoln's first visit to Richmond, on Monday last:

Mr. Lincoln left City Point in the flagship of Admiral Porter, accompanied by the Bat, and, ascending the James, arrived at Rockett's Landing early in the day. He was accompanied, in the way of a guard, by one company of marines and one company of armed sailors (a distinction without a difference). As the President approached the headquarters of Major-General Weitzel the salutes were opened, and he was found to be accompanied by Admiral Porter and an immense crowd of the people, who accorded to their liberator the cordial acclamations of a race owing him so much. It was truly a cheering sight to see Abraham Lincoln walking, rather than riding in a palfrey, the streets of Richmond—proud but fallen city of the South—followed by an admiring crowd, where, but a few hours before, he would have been the subject of rebel jest and rivalry, which his own patience has overcome, even to the approaching point of rebel consideration of folly.

The President, upon his arrival in the city, was immediately escorted, by his own choice, upon foot, to the headquarters of Major-Gen. Weitzel, commanding department, which are in the house of Jefferson Davis, and the threshold of which that arch-rebel crossed for the last time on Sunday evening, to take the cars for Danville, followed by his broken army. The President of the United States receiving the congratulations of an admiring auditory in the city of Richmond, and within that (late) domestic precincts of Jefferson Davis, needs no comment to cause the American people to believe that this atrocious struggle is quite at its end.

Major General Weitzel, upon the sudden appearance of Mr. Lincoln, held extemporized drawing-room receptions in the Executive mansion of the Confederacy, to which the President loaned, in his presence, the chiefest attraction. He was introduced to the leading general and staff officers of the Department of Virginia and the Army of the James now present in Richmond.

Just subsequent to the reception there was a private conference, after which the President rode out to see the city of Richmond—object of all his Presidential affections.

The ride over, the President proceeded to his ship, leaving us to the kindly realm of future developments.

Boston Transcript

Apr. 8/65

LINCOLN WAS MAD

About the Delay in Receipt of Telegrams at the White House.

"I have read several of the Lincoln anniversary speeches, which have appeared in the papers in the past few days," said Mr. Charles Frederick last evening, "and have been struck with the statement contained in some of them to the effect that Mr. Lincoln seldom got mad, and that when he did get mad, he did not allow himself to get very mad. If these speakers spoke from their personal experience, it is all right, but my personal experience with him one night satisfied me he could get up a terribly good-sized case of mad at times.

"I was a boy at the time, and was a messenger for the old American Telegraph Company, which in after years was absorbed by the present Western Union Telegraph. For several days there had been a number of telegrams for the President from army officers; and among them I remember two or three from General McClellan. I don't remember now why they did not come over the military telegraph lines. Well, one night I started over to the White House with a telegram that I knew came from Gen. McClellan. It was for the President.

"In those days there was always a guard of soldiers stationed at the two avenue gates, as also at the other gates, but messenger boys were generally well known, and they were admitted, day or night, without any question, at least to the front door, where another soldier guard was also stationed. There was always an officer about the door, who receipted for telegrams. This night, however, I saw Mr. Lincoln coming toward the outer gate, and I thought I would personally hand him the telegram, which I did. He smiled pleasantly enough as he opened it, but a change suddenly came over him.

"Have you the other telegrams?" he demanded of me. I replied that I had but the one, though I informed him that I knew that there had been one or two others that day from Gen. McClellan.

"That is what he says," added the President, "and what annoys me is that I have not received them."

"Then, turning to the sentry, he said: 'Send up to the door for the officer in charge and tell him that when telegrams come here addressed to me they should and must be delivered to me. Tell him also, and by this time the President was very mad, 'that if he sends any more of my telegrams over to Mr. Stanton's house I'll drive him away from here. Mr. Stanton has enough telegrams of his own, and should not have mine.'"

"Though I was but a boy," said Mr. Frederick, "I could see that Mr. Lincoln was mad all the way through, and that, at that moment at least, he was displeased. The War Minister, Secretary Stanton, and he intended exactly what he said. The President, then directing himself to me, continued: 'Boy, tell your folks that I don't have my telegrams, and if they come about the door interfere any more I'll drive every one of them away. I don't want them, and never did want them, about my place.'"

1896

PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S TELEGRAPH OPERATORS.

How the Commander-in-Chief Watched His Army.

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OMAHA, June 27.—One of the greatest nerve centers of the late civil war was the telegraph office at the war department at Washington. Through it passed all the dispatches from the field, and by it were sent out the orders from President Lincoln and Secretary Stanton to the generals commanding. A corps of the best operators in the country were kept at work, and the most rapid telegraphers of the United States were in charge. General Anson Stager, who had been superintendent of the Western Union Telegraph, was the head, and next to him was General Thomas T. Eckert, who is now president of the Western Union Telegraph lines. General Eckert sustained the closest relations to President Lincoln, and Lincoln used to chat with him by the hour in the telegraph office. Eckert was also a good story teller, and some of the best of Lincoln's stories were told while the operators were clicking out messages of war. Under these chiefs there were a number of very fast telegraphers, among the brightest of whom was Edward Rosewater, now proprietor of the Omaha Bee. During the war Mr. Rosewater was for a time a telegrapher in the field. His rapid work there attracted the attention of the commanders, and he was brought to Washington to act as one of the confidential operators at the war department. During his stay in Washington he kept a diary, and he has a number of interesting stories of his experiences of the incidents of that time which have never been given to the public. Said he:

"The war department during the time of President Lincoln was in the old War Department Building. This was a three-story structure just above the White House. The telegraph office adjoined the office of secretary Stanton. It consisted of two rooms, one of which was devoted to the preparation and deciphering of cipher messages, and another the operating-room proper, which also contained the war department library. In the cipher room sat General Stager, General Eckert and two cipher operators. The outer room contained about ten marble tables, upon each of which was a telegraphic instrument of the latest pattern. We had, you know, the finest machinery known at that time, and the operators were chosen for their expert work. They had to be fine penmen, and one of the requirements of the position was to be able to write out the dispatches as rapidly as they came from the wires. This is done by many operators today. It was not so common then.

Our War Telegraph System.

"Who organized our war telegraph? General Anson Stager and General Eckert. General Stager was, you know, superintendent of the Western Union telegraph before the war began. He was called to Washington to take charge of the telegraph system and organize a military telegraph. The first wire built was that which ran from the war department to the navy-yard. Then a system of communication was made with the camps lying within ten or twelve miles of the White House, and the capitol building was connected with the navy department by a loop. The lines were soon extended to the Chain bridge, then over into Virginia, and finally they had direct communication with all parts of the country. General Stager originated the cipher code used in the department. He was an expert operator himself, and one time when riding on the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne and Chicago Road the train broke down nine miles away from any telegraph office. General Stager cut the

wires and by holding one above and one below his tongue was able to receive the messages by watching its movements caused by the electric shocks passing through it. By this means he received a reply that another engine would be sent to him at once. General Eckert was also an expert telegrapher. His relations with President Lincoln were very close, and he can, I venture, tell more good stories of Lincoln than any other man now living. President Lincoln often came into the telegraph office and he frequently sent messages through me. He generally came in early in the morning and he often remained in the office at night when serious operations were going on in the field.

"There was, as a rule, not a great deal of work to be done at night, though at times the wires were kept hot. During a great part of 1863 I was the night chief of the office. I had in the corridor outside the operating rooms a half dozen cavalymen, who were on hand to carry such dispatches as were important. I remember once during the winter of 1863 that a telegram came urging that re-enforcements be sent at once to Columbus, Ky. This was then a very important military point, and the rebels were moving upon it in large force, and the union general commanding had in his dispatch asked for re-enforcements. I was anxious that the report should go to General Halleck at once. The message came to me between midnight and 1 a. m. I handed it to one of the orderlies, and told him to take it at once to General Halleck. I then waited for a dispatch in the way of an order from Halleck as to the re-enforcements. An hour passed by, nothing came. A second hour went by, and still no order. I was anxious, for I feared that the wires might be cut or broken before morning, and in this case no relief could be gotten to our forces at Columbus. I waited all night, but no message came from Halleck. Between 7 and 8 o'clock in the morning I went out for my breakfast, and upon returning asked if General Halleck had yet ordered re-enforcements. I found that he had not, and I went out and asked the orderly if he had delivered my message, and, if so, why had he not brought an answer. He replied that General Halleck had given directions that he was never to be disturbed after midnight. This statement made me very angry. The idea of the commanding general of a great army giving orders that he was to be awakened under no circumstances, when such vital interests were under his charge, seemed to me ridiculous. I was so wrought up over the matter that I thought I would go to the President and tell him what Halleck was doing and how he had treated this order. In the first place, however, I decided to ask General Stager, who was, you know, my superior officer. I did so, and told him I was going to see the President. He replied by asking me what business it was of mine whether the order was sent or not. Said he: 'My boy, you have nothing to do with General Halleck's orders. We have done our duty. It is our business to receive and deliver dispatches, and that is all we can do.' I was still angry, but after General Stager's making such a remark I could do nothing. He was my superior officer, and his answer was in the nature of an order."

General Burnside's Vigilance.

"Was this the case with the other officers?" I asked.

"No," replied Mr. Rosewater. "Many of the officers watched things more carefully. Take General Burnside, for instance. I knew him quite well. He often remained up all night. I could not, in fact, tell when he slept, and I have often given him dispatches as late as 5 o'clock in the morning. I had

known Burnside before I met Halleck and I did not think much of a man who could not stay awake upon great occasions all night. General Burnside was in command at the battle of Fredericksburg, where we had, you know, such a disastrous defeat. He did not wish to be commander of the army, and he told President Lincoln that he was not competent to take charge of it. Lincoln insisted, however, and he at last accepted the place. Burnside maintained that there was treachery in the war department, and that the rebels got the orders sent out from the war department as soon as he did, and that in this way they were able to counteract his proposed movements before he executed them.

Lincoln in the Telegraph Office.

"Was Lincoln in the office at the time of the battle of Fredericksburg?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mr. Rosewater. "He came into the office at 8 o'clock that morning and remained there until long after dark. He came over from the White House in his slippers, I remember. It was Sunday, and the dispatches were going and coming all day. President Lincoln stood behind me much of the time and dictated the dispatches to me, which I wrote and sent. I took the answers as they came from the wires and handed them to him. We were sending and receiving news all morning. At noon the dispatches were still coming, and instead of getting a lunch, Secretary Stanton sent over to the Winder Building and got an ice pitcher. He sent this out

and had it filled with beer, and this beer, with some crackers, made up the lunch for the party, General Eckert, Captain Fox and the secretaries of the navy and war all taking their turn at the pitcher. President Lincoln took his share of the beer, and I am, I venture, one of the few men who have ever taken a drink of beer with President Lincoln."

"How did President Lincoln act at such times?"

"He was simple and unassuming," replied Mr. Rosewater. "He did not seem at all nervous during the battle, though it was going against us. The result was, you know, an awful defeat, and we lost more than 13,000 in killed and wounded. Burnside did not want to make the attack, but he was overruled by Secretary Stanton and President Lincoln. After the battle it seemed to me that President Lincoln was very much depressed and worn. He was never, however, averse to a joke, and a laugh seemed to relieve him. Shortly after the battle of Fredericksburg Burnside was released from command, and Frank Leslie's newspaper published an illustration in which Lincoln was represented as the high chief executioner with a great big ax in his hand chopping off heads. On the ground near him in this picture lay McClellan's head, which had just been chopped off. Beside this was the head of Burnside, and there were other heads at hand ready to be cut off. It was not long after this fight that one of these papers was lying on one of the telegraph tables when President Lincoln came in. As he was looking at it General Burnside entered. They discussed the picture together and both laughed heartily over it."

"I suppose there were many funny things happening even during the darkest days of the war, were there not?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Rosewater, "there were many little interesting things which seemed silly to me at the time. The war was to me so serious that I could not appreciate that great minds like that of President Lincoln must have relaxation. I remember once when things looked the blackest Tom Thumb and General Nutt were brought by P. T. Barnum to the White House. President Lincoln and his cabinet gave up business for an hour and spent it in being entertained by them. This at the time seemed to me outrageous. I thought it was a very foolish proceeding to engross the attention of the President at such a time; but it was perhaps a needed relaxation. I saw Tom Thumb afterward and he told me that he rode to the White House that day in a carriage which was given to him by Queen Victoria."

McClellan and His Horses' Tongues.

"Did President Lincoln really know much about the operations of the war?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, President Lincoln knew of every movement on the military chess

board. He directed many of the operations himself. It was he who removed McClellan. I don't think the real story of this order has ever been told. It was just after the battle of Antietam in September, 1862. Both Lincoln and Stanton had been urging McClellan to move on after General Lee's army and capture it. I sent for President Lincoln message after message to McClellan directing him to move on, and McClellan repeatedly replied that rapid movement was impossible. He held back on various pretexts, and finally sent a message which capped the climax. This last telegram was as follows:

"President Lincoln:

"We are still delayed. Cavalry horses' tongues are sore.
GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN."

"The idea of stopping a great army because of the soreness of the tongues of the horses was more than Lincoln could stand. Within an hour after the telegram came McClellan's head was off. An order was issued relieving him of the command of the Army of the Potomac."

"How did Secretary Stanton impress you?" I asked.

"Edwin M. Stanton seemed to me a 'mar. of great force,'" replied Editor Rosewater. "There was no joking about him, and he did enormous amount of work. You must

(incomplete)



E. ROSEWATER.

of Abraham Lincoln's Telegraph Operators, Now Proprietor of the Omaha Bee



GENERAL T. T. ECKERT.

[One of the Organizers of the War Telegraph Service.]

LINCOLN AS A WAR TELEGRAPHER SAW HIM

David Homer Bates Describes the President's Daily Visits to the Office That Handled News From the Northern Armies and Their Leaders

It was the privilege of David Homer Bates, now a white-haired man of 83, to see Abraham Lincoln nearly every day for four years, during the trying period of the Civil War, when President Lincoln used to come regularly to the telegraph office in the War Department building for the latest dispatches from the front. Mr. Bates was one of four telegraph operators summoned to handle this important business for the Government. In later years he was to become Vice President of the Western Union Telegraph Company.

"We arrived in Washington on April 23, 1861," said Mr. Bates. "A temporary office had been fitted up at the head of the first floor staircase in the War Department building. The Executive Mansion was not then equipped with telegraph facilities. The President usually came to us morning, noon and night for his news.

Relaxed and Told Stories.

"Day after day we watched his tall, homely form crossing the well-shaded lawn between the White House and the War Department. While in the office, waiting for the message to be decoded (the Morse telegraph was being used, for the first time, to direct widely separated armies), Mr. Lincoln could relax from the continuous strain under which he labored. It was at such times that he would tell his inimitable stories. He was always genial, even when the prospect was darkest, and I do not recall that he was ever long in the clutches of a melancholy mood.

"Lincoln never made an error in his writing," said Mr. Bates. "He never scratched out or erased a word. This is a fair example"—and a dispatch in the well-known handwriting was produced from a portfolio. Neat lines covered a sheet headed "Executive Mansion." The President, it was explained, always thought out what he wanted to say and put it down "with deliberation and care."

"Mr. Lincoln wrote the first draft

of the Emancipation Proclamation not eight feet from where I sat at work. This document was not, as many think, the accomplishment of a few hours or days. It was the labor of weeks. To my best recollection, he spent three weeks at the first draft of it.

Replying to a question regarding his first impression of Mr. Lincoln, Mr. Bates remarked:

"It was not long until I was thoroughly alive to the great depth of his character, nor did I fail to notice the change in his expression as it saddened with the long-drawn-out misery of the war.

In his book, "Lincoln and the Telegraph Office," Mr. Bates has given a description of him based on the notes in his diary: "In intervals of repose Lincoln's face was a study; the inherent sadness of his features was evident even to us youngsters. Indeed, it was sometimes pathetic. We often wondered what he was thinking; but he would not long remain idly pensive."

The first humorous remark Mr. Bates heard him make in the cipher room was at the expense of the press. It was evoked by an announcement from Drainsville, Va., that General Schenck had captured, in a skirmish, thirty or forty of the enemy, all of whom were armed with Colt revolvers. The Commander-in-Chief of the army duly remarked that by the time the newspapers published this story the Colt revolve would have grown into horse pistols.

Perhaps no one of his sallies ever provoked greater mirth in the cipher room among "the boys" than did one relating to his favorite horsehair sofa. "It stood against the wall in the office; and often, tired out from a long night's vigil, the President would

come in, remove his hat and famous plaid shawl, and, making his way to it, would throw himself down upon the shiny surface. One day while we were all seriously attentive to our task, he arose abruptly and, knocking a bug from his collar, said: 'Boys, I have been very fond of that old

lounge, but I will have to discard it now that it has become a little buggy.'

"Frequently he would lean over our shoulders as we worked, intently watching us, interested in our job of unraveling the codes. Then he would open the drawer in my desk in which the translated messages were kept.

One after another he would read them, until he came to the last one, which he had seen on his previous visit. 'Now, we are down to the raisins,' he would invariably announce.

"After we had heard him make the same remark several times, some one ventured to ask what he meant by it. Then Lincoln told the story of the little girl who had overladen her capacity with too large a dinner, which had been topped off with raisin cake. The inevitable followed. When the doctor, who had been called in, saw the little block objects again reach the light of day, he exclaimed: 'She's all right now, we're down to raisins.'

"Many of the anecdotes accredited to the President were fabrications of other minds. He himself was aware of the countless stories to which his name was falsely attached. When told that he was quoted as saying that he would like to give his other Generals the same brand of whiskey in which Grant indulged, he said there was about as much truth in it as in the yarn about George III, in which that monarch is reported to have said that if General Wolfe was mad he would like to have him bite all the members of his military staff."

But the aged telegraph operator treasures more than just humorous sketches. He speaks of the gentle, kind-hearted and compassionate Lincoln, tells of his sympathy with even the humblest of his subordinates, and relates, as an illustrative incident, Lincoln's meeting with a poor young mother, who, a babe in her arms, had traveled some distance to seek her husband, a soldier in Grant's army.

The President came across the weeping woman in a hallway outside of the telegraph office door. Learning of her plight, and of her hope to show the

child to her husband, who had left before its birth, the kind-hearted President sought to have her sent to join him. Major Eckert told him there was a strict ruling that no woman should be allowed to go to the front. Thereupon the President obtained, through Secretary Stanton, a special leave for the soldier. Nor did he halt there. He inquired about the woman's stopping place, and, upon learning that she was a stranger, had her cared for in one of the hospitals.

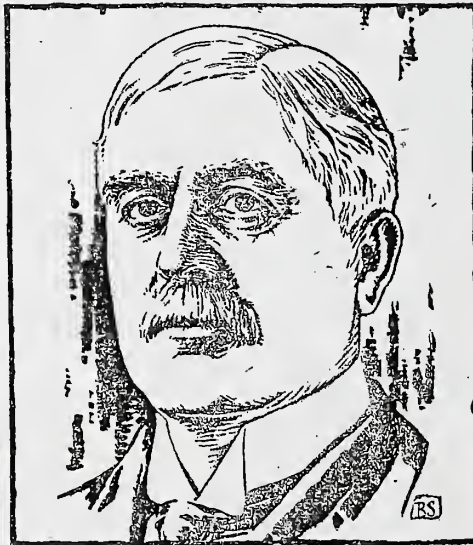
The day of the tragic visit to Ford's Theatre was not without its anecdote. A telegram had arrived, couched in terse phraseology. Abraham Lincoln looked it over, and raising his eyes said: "That reminds me of the English girl who was crossing a stream. On her head was a basket of eggs. Her skirts were tucked up to her knees, from the shore a woman called in her: 'My girl, how deep is the water; and what is the price of eggs?' To which came the answer: 'Up to my knees, and sixpence.'"

The Fatal Last Day.

His last telegram was to Major Gen. Welzel, dated April 12, 1865, in which he referred to the assembling of the Virginia Legislature. On the day of his assassination he came to the telegraph office to ask Major Eckert to accompany him to the theatre that night. According to Mr. Bates' account, as given in his book, the Major, who "could break a poker over his arm," declined, knowing that Secretary Stanton did not approve of the President's presencing himself in public that night.

"No words, I think, more perfectly fit this great President than do those I penned in my diary on April 15, 1865," concluded Mr. Bates. They are these:

"Abraham Lincoln, 'first pure, then peaceable, gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partially and without hypocrisy.' James III, 17."



David Homer Bates.

WHEN LINCOLN KISSED A CUB REPORTER

THE "SLOW, DESPAIRING WALK" of the President as he came out of the White House in the golden twilight of a certain May day, and "with bent head made his way to the War Department," gave significant expression to



From "When Lincoln Kissed Me"
(Abingdon Press, New York)

HE BROUGHT GLAD NEWS

Henry E. Wing, the young war correspondent, who relieved Lincoln's anxiety at a crucial moment.

"the depth of alarm in the mind of the Administration." Friendly passers-by shook their heads at the sight, while "the unfriendly—and there were always those who were unfriendly going up and down Pennsylvania Avenue in those days—cast looks of hate, verging on exultation. In their hearts they were saying, 'Another twenty-four hours and Lee will be here!'" With this graphic picture, Miss Ida M. Tarbell, not the least felicitous of Lincoln's biographers, opens a lively narrative in *Collier's* of "how"—to quote the head-line writer—"a cub reporter 'scooped' the world and won the President's friendship." There was reason enough, continues the author, "for

the President's bent head and slow walk. For nearly three days now there had been no word from the Army of the Potomac. It was as if it had dropt into an abyss—the silence was terrifying."

The people "knew that at midnight of Tuesday, Grant had started his Army of veterans from Culpeper, only some sixty miles away, on what they were daring to hope, in spite of three years of repeated efforts and failures, would be the final move on Richmond. He had moved across the 'Rapid Ana'—that they knew." But "what had he done all day Wednesday? All day Thursday? And what was he doing to-day? How could it be that an Army of 122,000 men, with an open country between it and Washington and an open river, could be lost?" Reentering with the historian's pen the public anxiety on that critical May day, Miss Tarbell throws a fresh light on the adventures of a young war correspondent, Henry E. Wing. In later years Mr. Wing became a Methodist clergyman, and wrote his own story for *The Christian Advocate*, since which it has been printed in brochure form under the title, "When Lincoln Kissed

Me." Miss Tarbell, who has evidently drawn on varied sources for her little history, completes her background of public anxiety with a glimpse of government clerks gathering at windows overlooking the Potomac "as if to see a cloud of gray coats swarming upon them." And, to complete the President's agony of suspense:

All day Thursday, all night Thursday, all day Friday, Congressmen and Cabinet officers had come and gone, come and gone to and from the White House, seeking what comfort they could from the President. And he—well, he had staked everything on Grant. And now Grant had disappeared.

His mind was heavy with foreboding as he followed the graveled path from the White House to his own particular chair in the telegraph office of the War Department. The boys all knew him there. For three years there had been a succession of them that had watched for his almost daily visit, and who all their lives thereafter were to tell how, pulling open a drawer in which the yellow tissue telegrams of the day awaited him, he would go over them—sometimes one long leg curled over the chair—sometimes both long legs propt on the desk—how he would ponder as he read, and now and then rise and go to the military map on the wall, tracing positions with his long finger, visualizing the movements reported—how sometimes he would stop and comment, tell a story.

They loved his coming, these young telegraph operators, but to-day their hearts were heavy for him—they had no news. The only thing that lay in his drawer was a telegram from Grant, three days old. It had come in early in the afternoon of Tuesday: "The crossing of the Rapidan effected. Forty-eight hours now will demonstrate whether the enemy intends giving battle this side of Richmond."

The forty-eight hours were past—and nobody knew whether the enemy had given battle or not.

"Nothing, Mr. President," the operator at the desk told him. "Nothing that amounts to anything. A man came in to Union Mills a little while ago, claiming he had left the Army early this morning. He wanted to talk to Mr. Dana, but he was not here. Then he asked to send a telegram to *The Tribune*. Secretary Stanton refused to let us use the wire for a newspaper and demanded the message. The fellow said he would not give it unless



LINCOLN AND HIS WAR CABINET

At the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Into their august presence was ushered the shabbily disguised "cub reporter," big with news of the Army and a confidential message from Grant to the President. (Left to right) Standing, Salmon P. Chase, Caleb P. Smith, Montgomery Blair. Seated, Edwin M. Stanton, the President, Gideon Welles, William H. Seward, Edward Bates.

we first sent a dispatch to his paper. The Secretary says he is a spy, and has ordered him to be shot in the morning."

A change came over the President's face as he listened. He sat straighter; his eyes lost their dull look. "Ordered him to be shot?" he said.

"Yes, Mr. President."

"He is at Union Mills?"

"Yes."

"Ask him if he will talk with the President."

Union Mills was a little Virginia settlement, twenty miles or so from Washington, on the military road to Culpeper. A government telegraph station, established there early in the war, was still in operation. It was not much to look at, this station—a small room, used only by the operator and those who came in for messages. Just now, however, there was an extra occupant.

On a cot at the side of the room there was stretched as disreputable and suspicious-looking figure as one ever sees. A slight figure—a boy you would say. He could not have weighed more than 130 pounds. He was clad in the rough butternut garb of a Virginia plantation hand, heavy brogans on his feet, the bottoms of his trousers tied over their tops with hempen cord. He wore a faded cap, he was unshaven, and from head to foot plastered with red Virginia mud. If you had looked close, you would have seen that two fingers were gone from his left hand.

He lay quiet enough. No one could have imagined from his despairing relaxation the turmoil of disappointment and rage inside his heart and head. He was sentenced to be shot in the morning—sentenced by the Secretary of War, whom he heartily hated. But that was not what enraged him. His wrath was that he, whom he had discovered to be the first man to get through from the Army with news, had not been allowed to send a dispatch to his paper, his beloved *Tribune*.

Here he was with the scoop of the war, and the Secretary had refused to let him use the wire—refused even tho he had promised to give the Secretary, when the dispatch was sent, all that he knew—refused and ordered him to be shot as a spy.

Well, he *would* be shot before he would give Stanton a word. It didn't belong to Stanton—he was not his man, he was *The Tribune's* man. And Stanton was a bully, anyway. Had not Stanton said that no newspaper men should be allowed with the Army? And had he not had to run away and sneak in? No, he'd die, but he would never give that man the satisfaction of having news that belonged to his paper.

And so he lay quietly, storming within. He did not understand telegraphy—this young boy; but lying there, absorbed in his thoughts, he suddenly was conscious that the ticking instrument was calling for him—Wing—Henry Wing—Henry Wing—Henry E. Wing, it said.

All his life he had had hunches. He knew there were things that men did not see with their eyes and feel with their hands. That instrument was asking for him, and he sat upright. And as he sat upright the operator said: "The President wants to know if you will talk with him. He wants to know if it is true that you have come from the Army."

"Tell him, yes."

"He wants to know if you will tell him what news you bring."

"Tell him if he will first send one hundred words to *The Tribune*, I will tell him."

The answer came back, "Write your hundred words and we will send it at once."

And so he wrote, scribbling fast the words of his message.

Back in Washington the revived President received the message at his desk, and he read between the lines the truth. Miss Tarbell continues:

Here was a spirited young correspondent, who, caring first for his trust, resented the arbitrary decision of his great Secretary of War. He read it as if it were all written there before him. His eyes twinkled, his lips parted into something like a smile—"Wasn't that like Stanton?" and "Wasn't it like a boy?"

He did not wait for consultation. He ordered that the message should go, not only to *The Tribune*, but to the country, and again questioned Henry. "If I send an engine for you, will you come to Washington?" And Henry Wing, back in Union Mills, was good enough to say "Yes."

An hour later a little military train was on its way to Union Mills, carrying in its rickety passenger-car Charles A. Dana, First Assistant Secretary of War, with a good-sized escort. Dana was to see Wing, and if possible to go on to the Army. The train was to bring the young correspondent back to Washington.

Between one and two o'clock of Saturday morning, May 7, the train came into the capital on its return trip, and Wing, unwashed, unbrushed, but entirely unconscious of the fact, stepped into a waiting carriage and was driven to the White House.

The Cabinet awaited him—Mr. Lincoln at his desk sitting upright, watching the door, the Secretaries grouped about—Seward, Stanton, Welles, Chase—tired and anxious men.

Sitting in the dimly lighted room, with the whole Administration of the United States around him, Henry Wing told his story, rising to point out now and then, on the big military map which hung on the wall, the movements of Grant's army, up to the time he had left.

What he told them was but little more than he had put into his message. It had been midnight on Tuesday that they had moved out from Culpeper—the whole Army of 122,000 men (it was now Saturday morning). They were going after Lee—that everybody knew. To get at him in his comfortable winter quarters they must cross the Rapidan, a nasty stream with only three fords. He, Henry, was with the second corps, Hancock's. They had done well and passed out of the tangle into the open country near Chancellorsville—a good place for a battle. They had entrenched and were expecting the other corps to come up—Warren's and Sedgwick's.

Nobody had thought of a battle until the whole Army was through the Wilderness—that is, nobody on the Union side; but Lee thought otherwise. He had come out of his entrenchments and attacked them Thursday morning, with half the Union Army still bottled up in the Wilderness.

They had fought all day, and at night when they came together nobody knew quite how the battle had gone. They only knew at headquarters that the whole Army was still on the south side of the Rapidan and that General Grant had ordered an attack the next morning.

"And you know nothing of what has happened in the last twenty-four hours?"

"No."

Henry Wing was conscious of the inadequacy of his news. It was not what had happened Thursday that they wanted to know now, but what had happened Friday, and why now, Saturday morning, they had no news of what had happened. It was almost as if they put him aside as they rose one by one, said "Good night, Mr. President," and left the room. The President himself seemed so overwhelmed with uncertainty that he was scarcely conscious that Henry Wing had lingered behind.

"You wanted to speak to me?" said Mr. Lincoln.

"Yes, Mr. President. I have a message for you—a message from General Grant. He told me I was to give it to you when you were alone."

In an instant the President was all awareness, intent: "Something from Grant to me?"

"Yes," blurted out Henry. "He told me I was to tell you, Mr. President, that there would be no turning back."

The harried man had waited long—three years—for such a word: the one word that could have brought him help in his despair; and, sweeping his long arm around the boy, he gathered him to him, and bending over prest a kiss on his forehead. "Come and tell me about it," he said.

They sat down, and suddenly all of Henry's journalistic discretion was gone. Here was one who had the right to know, and so he told him of the horrors and uncertainties of that day in the Wilderness—of men fighting without knowing where they were going, fighting in groups, not in masses; of Hancock being left without support; of Warren's overcaution, bottling up the troops that Hancock had expected would support him; of a day gone wrong from start to finish.

He told how, when night had come and commanders and correspondents had gathered at headquarters, there had been angry charges, one officer accusing another. There had been Meade's decision that they should fall back north of the river, reestablish their lines, and try again later, and then General Grant had come in with his quiet but final, "No, we shall attack again in the morning."

He told how, when at four o'clock Friday morning he had presented himself at headquarters and announced to the General that he was carrying out news to his paper, Grant had led him aside and looking at him intently had said, "You think you can get to Washington?" He had no doubt of it, nor did the General's question arouse any doubt.

"Then," said the General, "if you do see the President, see him alone, and tell him that General Grant says there will be no turning back."

His story was told. It was four o'clock in the morning, and the President, rising, said, "It is time for you to get to bed, Henry. You look as if you needed rest, but come to see me to-morrow afternoon." And Henry Wing, who had not had more than three hours' sleep at a time for some five days now, stumbled out of the White House, down to the National Hotel where he kept a room, and up-stairs to throw himself, Virginia mud and all, across the bed, and to fall into a sleep of utter exhaustion.

**The First Cross-Country Telegraph Line Was Completed Just
70 Years Ago—It and the Transcontinental Railroad
Won the West from the Indians.**

¹⁰ October 24 is an important date in the history of the United States. Just 70 years ago this week—Oct. 24, 1861—telegrams were sent across the United States, between San Francisco and New York, for the first time. The first transcontinental telegraph line was completed and service begun. And with the completion of that first cross-country telegraph line, the famous Pony Express went out of existence.

Thus the half million people on the Pacific Coast at that time were able to keep in close touch with their relatives and friends in the East. The electric spark now carried their telegrams back and forth. For more than 30 years, since 1830, when the first covered wagon blazed the trail to the Far West, they had been almost shut off from the world.

They had reached their destination only after months of hard and dangerous travel, either by covered wagon across plains and mountains or by boat around South America. There was also another way of reaching the Far West—by boat to the Isthmus of Panama, thence overland across the isthmus, and again by boat to San Francisco. That trip could be made in about a month if all went well.

¹¹
When Mails Were Slow

That was the safest way to send mail. True, there were two overland stage routes that carried mail a little faster if they succeeded in getting through. The danger was that the stages would be attacked by Indians or held up by bandits and the mail destroyed.

In 1830, the Pony Express was established. Two hundred stations were set up between St. Joseph, Mo., and Sacramento, Calif. There were 500 of the best horses that money could buy and 80 of the most expert and fearless riders that this country has ever had. The stations were from 10 to 15 miles apart and each rider rode three horses in succession, covering not less than 33 miles, before he passed on his mail pouch to the next rider. The regular schedule for the 1,400-mile dash in each direction was 10 days. The fastest trip was made in 7 days, 17 hours, when President Lincoln's First Inaugural Address was carried. After operating for 16 months, the Pony Express went out of existence when the transcontinental telegraph line was completed.

¹²
It Was a Hard Job

That telegraph line was built by the Western Union Telegraph Company, after Hiram Sibley, its president, had persuaded Congress to help pay for it. The com-

pany received from the Government \$40,000 a year for ten years. The line was built in two sections—one eastward from California, the other westward from the Missouri River. Poles had to be set up and wire strung on them over treeless plains and lofty mountains. On the plains the poles had to be hauled for hundreds of miles. Often the builders had to fight off Indians. At times they were threatened with starvation. Rain hampered them in their work. But they kept on and on until the two sections were linked up at Salt Lake City. In spite of all hardships and difficulties, they completed the line in less than five months!

¹³
Good-bye, Covered Wagon

The cross-country telegraph line was the first big step toward closing the vast gap of unsettled land that separated Eastern and Western United States. The second step was the completion of the first transcontinental railroad in 1869. It was then that the Iron Horse took the place of the covered wagon and migration westward increased by leaps and bounds. The telegraph and the railroad brought quick communication and easy travel between East and West. The "happy hunting ground" of the Indians was settled by the pioneers and formed into States.

Today a person on the Pacific Coast can sit at his radio and hear what is going on in New York. If he wishes to write a letter to a friend in New York that letter can be delivered in little more than a day by air mail. If he wishes to visit New York and happens to be a Major "Jimmy" Doolittle or a Captain Frank Hawks he can jump into an airplane and make the trip in half a day. All this has come in 70 years! But 70 years ago this week, the opening of the first transcontinental telegraph line was much more wonderful to the people on the Pacific Coast than the marvels of modern science are to all of us today.

Current Events
Oct. 19-23, 1931

Manchester Union 5-3-40

Answers to Questions

Q. What was the first transcontinental telegraph message? M. B.

A. The first transcontinental telegraph message was sent to Abraham Lincoln from Stephen J. Field, chief justice of California on Oct. 24, 1861. The message was as follows: "In the temporary absence of the governor of the state I am requested to send you the first message which will be transmitted over the wires of the telegraph line which connects the Pacific with the Atlantic states. The people of California desire to congratulate you upon the completion of your great work. They believe that it will be the means of strengthening the attachment which binds both the East and the West to the Union and they desire in this—the first message across the continent—to express their loyalty to the Union and their election to stand by their government on this day of trial."

These historical gems are among a choice collection uncovered in "Bohemian Brigade," an exciting book about Civil War reporters, written by Louis M. Starr and published this week by Alfred A. Knopf. So far as we know, they've never come to light before, not even in Oliver Gramling's "AP - The Story of News."

The Civil War reporter wasn't an accepted personage in American life. Many generals - and Washington officials, too - thought the conduct of battles and campaigns was none of the public's business. None were tougher than William Tecumseh Sherman; he regarded reporters as spies and barred them from his camps. One AP man tried to get in by pleading that folks back home were anxious about the army's welfare. "What the hell do we care about the country," Sherman's aide told him. "You should go to Washington for news."

Generally, though, AP men had easier going than reporters for individual papers, as shown by an 1861 incident. (Keep in mind that, though AP had been set up by the leading New York City newspapers for their mutual benefit, it served skimpy budgets of news to other papers over the country.)

Secretary of War Cameron had been extending special privileges to some reporters, a favoritism that aroused New York editors to such howls of anguish that Cameron found it expedient to go to New York on a mission of appeasement. He conferred with Frederic Hudson, of the Herald, and Henry J. Raymond, of the Times, who also happened to comprise AP's executive committee. They made an agreement: "all official documents of whatever kind, emanating from the (federal) departments, be delivered to the general agent of The Associated Press - and to him alone - for prompt and

simultaneous transmission."

Abraham Lincoln was ahead of his time in recognizing the value of friendly relations with the press. He chatted with reporters at every opportunity, although it must be acknowledged that his aim was more to get information than to give it. Nevertheless, in at least one instance, he interceded to make sure that the people knew promptly how a big battle was going. It was during U. S. Grant's Wilderness campaign of 1864. The country knew only that a great struggle had begun. Washington was equally in the dark.

Henry E. Wing, of the New York Tribune, brought out the first word of the battle. From Union Mills, Va., he asked War Department permission to send a story over the military telegraph. Secretary of War Stanton (he had succeeded Cameron) asked where Grant was. Wing refused to tell Stanton anything unless he could also advise his paper. Stanton ordered Wing arrested. Then Lincoln heard of the argument, quickly agreed to let Wing use the telegraph - provided that he give The AP a summary of his story!

The Hooker nickname was bestowed by accident. An unknown AP copyist happened to use a slug line, "Fighting - Joe Hooker," on a story. Several editors removed the dash and used the line as a subhead, "Fighting Joe Hooker." The name stuck and Hooker became "Fighting Joe" forever after.

Hooker figures in Starr's book in another way that should endear him to newsmen: He was the father of the byline. At the time, only pen names or initials of a few star reporters appeared in print. Many editors insisted on anonymity, arguing it encouraged freedom and boldness in writing! Then, in 1863, Hooker ordered that all dispatches from his army had to be signed. Believe it or not, many reporters didn't take kindly to the idea. "It is discouraging for reporters to have their names paraded before the public," said one. Another did not "desire the ostentation." But the practice caught on, and spread sufficiently, as Starr says, "to establish for Fighting Joe a fair claim to having given the byline to American journalism."

The daily war communique is another fixture of modern reporting that was born in the Civil War. Lincoln seems to have been the leading spirit in promoting the idea; Stanton put it into effect in 1864. The method of release was somewhat devious: The War Department telegraphed the daily bulletins from Washington to Gen. John A. Dix in New York and he released them to - who else? - The Associated Press. *The A. P. Sec. Sept 15. 1864*

(Note: For this week's Preamble, with its sidelights on AP history, we bow to Bob Price, the Log's news analyst and a well known student of the War Between The States....AJG).

JOHN M. CUMMINGS

Penna. Telegrapher At Front in Civil War

ON A JUNE day in 1861 President Lincoln visited the Arsenal located at a point where the East Branch enters the Potomac near Washington. For several minutes he watched a telegraph operator send and receive messages which included one from the President himself to the White House.

"Young man," said Mr. Lincoln, "you do that well. Where do you hail from?"

"From the Pennsylvania Railroad, Mr. President," the operator, Richard O'Brien, answered.

"Are you one of the operators who came with (Andrew) Carnegie and (David H.) Bates?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Well, you are pretty safe here, surrounded by all these big guns," Mr. Lincoln smilingly remarked.

"Yes, Mr. President," young O'Brien answered, "but I would much rather be at the front where I could hear them roar."

One of the first group of four men to become "military telegraphers" in the Civil War, Richard O'Brien, of Philadelphia, Scranton and other points in Pennsylvania, was taken to Washington by Andrew Carnegie who later in life would become the country's leading producer of steel.

Richard was followed into the Army's wire service by a younger brother, Dr. John Emmett O'Brien. The physician practiced in Scranton and in 1910 brought out a book, "Telegraphing in Battle," in which he told of the experiences of his brother and himself.

THE O'Brien brothers did get to the front. They saw the big guns in death-dealing action and heard their terrible roar. Richard was with Sherman on the historic march which wrought such devastation to a considerable section of the South.

At one time or another they were in contact either personally or by wire with leading figures on the Federal side, including Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Sheridan and McClellan. Richard took for Sherman the message from Grant announcing the surrender of Lee and instructing him to spread the news throughout his command.

The O'Brien boys were born in Waterford county, Ireland, to which their parents had returned after living for some years in Philadelphia. Financial reverses caused by the failure of the United States Bank dictated return to the homeland. Before they returned to America in 1851 Richard and John Emmett were born. Richard was the older by 12 years.



JOHN M. CUMMINGS

AT THE outbreak of the war Richard O'Brien was a young telegraph operator with the Pennsylvania Railroad. Andrew Carnegie, the road's top man at the key, became the founder of what was termed the Military Telegraph. Richard O'Brien operated the first Morse line out of Philadelphia and when the war began he was chief operator of the middle division of the Pennsylvania at Harrisburg.

General McClellan in 1862 was having his full share of trouble in the Peninsula Campaign. He was under severe criticism in the North. One day the younger of the O'Brien brothers took this message from the Adjutant General to McClellan: "By direction of the President, General McDowell's corps has been detached from the force under your immediate command and the General is ordered to report to the Secretary of War."

Later relieved of command, McClellan, born in Philadelphia, was in time restored to his old post. Further vicissitudes followed and he resigned from the Army in 1864. Popular with the soldiers, "Little Mac" in that same year held the Democratic nomination for President, receiving 21 electoral votes.

War Telegraph Office Revealed As Lincoln's Favorite Retreat

Throughout the Civil war one of Lincoln's favorite resting places was the telegraph office, in the War department.

In times of great suspense, during actual or impending battles, it was his practice to go informally to Stanton's office and spend hour after hour with the war secretary where he could read the telegrams as fast as they were received in the adjoining telegraph room. He did not always wait for them to be handed in but made the cipher room his rendezvous, keeping in close touch with the cipher operators and looking over their shoulders when he knew that some especially important message was in process of translation.

When in the telegraph office Lin-

coln was most easy of access. He often talked with the cipher operators, asking questions regarding the dispatches which were being translated from or into cipher or which were filed in the order of receipt in the drawer in the cipher desk. Lincoln's habit was to go immediately to the drawer each time he came into the room and read over the telegrams beginning at the top and reading down until he came to the ones he had read on his last visit.

In the White House, Lincoln had little or no leisure but was constantly under a severe strain from which he said he obtained welcome relief by his visits to the telegraph office. There only was he comparatively free from interruption.

Sometimes he would remain there all night awaiting some important news from the front. In the intervals of waiting he would send messages of inquiry, counsel and encouragement to the generals in the field, to the governors of the states and sometimes to soldiers announcing pardon or reprieve from death sentence for desertion or sleeping on post. He almost lived in the telegraph office when a battle was in progress and on other occasions he would drop in, as he jocosely remarked, to get rid of the pestering crowd of officeseekers.

The War department telegraph office was the scene of many important conferences between Lincoln and the members of his cabinet, generals, congressmen and others who soon learned that when the President was not at the White House he could most likely be found in the telegraph office.

It was while sitting at a desk in the cipher room that Lincoln wrote the first draft of the Emancipation proclamation. On the first day he did

not cover one sheet of the paper on which he was writing. On some days he would not write more than a line or two. Each day he would read over carefully and revise what he had previously written. This went on every day for several weeks until the first draft was finished. The President said he had been able to work more quietly and command his thoughts better than at the White House where he was frequently interrupted.

CABLE. Dover-Calais cable dates from 1851.

successful

First Atlantic cable was in operation Aug. 5, 1858-Oct. 20, 1858.

Permanently successful cable dates from 1866. There was, therefore, no communication with Europe by cable during the war. The telegraph perfected for commercial operation by Morse in 1844, was in general use.

Bates, David Homer

LINCOLN IN THE TELEGRAPH OFFICE, gives intimate picture of the part played by the telegraph in the Civil War.

